

## Sidewalks as planned

Jeanette Browning  
Assistant Editor

After a special joint meeting Monday evening with the Platte City Board of Aldermen, Public Works Committee and residents on First Street, the plans to build a sidewalk on the east side of that street will go on as planned.

With eight residents in attendance at the meeting, the board listened to approximately a half-hour of testimony from First Street area residents, both for and against the sidewalks.

At the regular Board of Aldermen meeting last week, the board addressed a petition from four property owners on First Street in opposition to the sidewalk. The city's Capital Improvement Program this year includes the reconstruction of a portion of First Street. Contractors are ready to begin installation of sidewalks, and the special meeting was organized last week to expedite a decision and not hold up the contractor.

City Administrator Keith Moody said in the CIP process, three public meetings are held for each project and sidewalks are discussed at those meetings. While Moody addressed the decision-making process for sidewalk placement and the grades of the surrounding lawn and existing driveways, resident Bill Williams had other concerns.

"I'm worried about the liability," said Williams, who signed the original protest petition. "I don't want to hold up progress, but the sidewalks in that area don't connect now. I'm getting ready to retire and I'll be on a fixed income - I don't want the cost or responsibility of a sidewalk."

He said sidewalks attracted skateboarders and bicyclists, and he feared if someone had an accident on his sidewalk he could be sued.

"Well, you can be sued for just about anything," Moody said. He agreed that the homeowner was technically liable for accidents on the sidewalk, but if properly maintained accidents were rare.

A woman in the audience, who refused to state her name for the Citizen, asked why the board was even entertaining suspending the sidewalks if they were part of the original plan for the capital improvements.

"We want to get along with people," said Mayor Dave Brooks. He said the city was working to ensure residents were happy with the improvements they received.

Board President Aaron Jung repeated his statement from last week, saying he was present during the public hearings prior to the decision to install a sidewalk - which were held approximately six months ago - and he didn't recall hearing any objections to sidewalks.

Williams said he in fact had objected to the sidewalks at the time.

## Cemetery relocation battle ongoing

Jeanette Browning  
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Both sides are still working to build their cases in the ongoing dispute over the relocation of several cemeteries located on property owned by the Kansas City Aviation Department.

According to local historian Olin Miller, while Kansas City attorneys would like to schedule a court hearing as soon as this month to determine the method used to clear the airport property, a request for further documentation filed last Wednesday will further delay any potential hearing.

Platte City attorney Mary Ann Thalman, who is acting on behalf of Miller and other descendents of several of the cemeteries in the proposed construction area, has given the Aviation Department until the end of July to produce its own site surveys and other documents related to the relocation project.

In April, the Platte County Circuit Court appointed attorney Bob Shaw as guardian ad litem for both known and unknown individuals buried in several of the non-endowed family cemeteries the Aviation Department's Commercial Development division is seeking to move. In a packed hearing April 6, Division I Judge Abe Shafer heard a relocation petition from Kansas City attorneys and recognized more than a dozen audience members whose ancestors are buried in the cemeteries in question.

Since then, Aviation Department-contracted archeologist Craig Sturdevant maintains the known cemeteries will be relocated in accordance with state statute. Sturdevant, a Jefferson City-based archeologist, has handled cemetery relocations at Lambert St. Louis International Airport.

Miller said it is unclear if family members will be able to halt the disinterment of the graves in local court and plans to continue to pursue recognition for possible graves outside the historical boundaries of the family cemeteries in question, as well as the possible slave cemetery. Another possible cemetery past the northern end of Childress Avenue may have also been discovered, and Miller said he is planning to work on locating the site of that cemetery as well.

He said Sturdevant's 2006 site report on the cemeteries had been sent to the Army Corps of Engineers for comment, and the Corps had issued a 65-page commentary on Sturdevant's findings. Miller and his attorney have been unable to get a copy of this report, and this is one of the documents requested in last week's filing.

"I think the city has opened a can of worms that they really didn't want to here," Miller said.

The Aviation Department is seeking to clear the land, located northwest of the Kansas City International Airport, to make way for a private racetrack — the KCI Motorsports Park. Construction for the track was slated to begin this spring and finish up in early 2008. The phase one plan includes construction of the north track, kart track and related buildings.

In addition to the north and kart tracks, phase one includes membership in a clubhouse overlooking the track. The clubhouse features a common area, locker rooms and showers, a race simulator, a conference room and a catered dining area. The main attraction of the facility will be a nearly four-mile, competition-level racetrack. The track can be run as the full circuit or can be operated as two separate tracks, a north track and a south track, with completion of the south track set for 2009.

These track constructions will force the relocation of the Brightwell, Miller/Rixy, Kimsey, Samuel Hoy and Hoy cemeteries, as well as a possible African-American slave cemetery on the former Brightwell property. As documented cemeteries now owned by the Aviation Department, the five family cemeteries fall under section 214 of the Missouri Revised Statutes and must be disinterred, transported and reburied in compliance with other state laws governing cemeteries. All remains would be relocated to another cemetery located near Tiffany Springs Parkway, also on Aviation Department property.

The relocation of the slave cemetery is of particular concern to Miller and local historian Shirley Kimsey. As a slave cemetery, the graves are unmarked, and no one knows exactly how many people may be interred there. The exact location of the cemetery was even up for debate until February when a group of local residents attempted to dowse the area. Kimsey believes 40-80 graves exist in the wooded area abutting a cornfield and fenceline.

In March, Kimsey and Miller felt the cemetery was in danger when Miller received notice Sturdevant's team would use heavy equipment to clear the brush. A small group of local residents visited the cemetery March 14 to protest any potentially damaging work on the site, but no clearing crews showed up.

## **Paddling Platte County**

JERRY KEUHN

Reporter

When Missourians consider paddling a canoe or kayak down a river, their first thought is usually of a trip down the Current, Niangua, Meramec or Jacks Fork Rivers in the Ozark region of south Missouri.

Thanks to the efforts of a couple of Platte County entrepreneurs, Platte County paddlers won't have to drive hours away for a guided trip anymore, as Farley residents Heather Bass and Steve Usnick have turned a weekend hobby into a new developing business — the Missouri River Paddling Company.

The married couple has lived in Farley for eight years and in the fall of 2006, began a new business venture with a shop location in English Landing Park in Parkville (164 S. Main, Ste. 413). For Usnick, a project engineer for Cape Environmental Management in Corporate Woods, and Bass, an administrative assistant for Colonial Presbyterian Church in Kansas City and a former music instructor for the West Platte School District, the new business provides an excellent escape into the great outdoors and away from their normal work routine.

“I think a kayak is a very intimate, up-close and relaxing way to see the river,” Usnick said. “We used to have a sailboat and it became a real pain to get in the water compared to the kayak. We fell in love with the kayak and then we weren’t interested in the sailboat anymore.”

The couple offers guided trips on the Missouri and Platte Rivers, with a four-hour trip (approximately 10-13 miles) from Parkville to Kansas City being the most popular trip provided. With each float, Usnick and Bass provide river safety and boat control advice, and act as tour guides with information about the river and its surroundings. In addition to the aforementioned trip which offers a different perspective of the Kansas City skyline than most people are familiar with, the Missouri River Paddling Company also offers other float trips on the Missouri River from St. Joseph to Kansas City, and excursions on the Platte River as well.

The company focuses on floats from the Schimmel City Access on the Platte River (near Farley) and on down the Missouri River to Parkville, approximately 17 miles; from Humphrey’s Access to the Schimmel City Access, about 6.5 miles; from Platte City to Humphrey’s Access, about 10 miles; and other alternatives on the Missouri River. A short trip that takes about an hour and originates and ends at the same point in the Platte Falls Conservation Area east of Platte City is also offered. Bass said the Duck Head float trip, which occurs because the Platte River circles back on itself, is a great trip for beginners, while the trips on the Big Muddy offer a different perspective.

“With the Missouri River, we have a great body of water here that was not accessible to a lot of people because there was no one doing it (offering guided trips),” Bass said. “We thought, ‘why can’t we be that somebody?’ It’s a great place to go that most people just drive over every day.”

Usnick said the Platte River also provides great floating opportunities.

“We like the Platte because there’s a lot of wildlife available and you’re away from the noise of the city traffic,” he said. “Also, the current is usually slow and it’s a peaceful float. One time, the current was so slow we passed a couple of guys going upstream and when we asked them where they were going, they said Kansas City. We told them it was going to be a very long trip if they didn’t turn around.”

The company offers both kayaks, of which theirs are more flat and wide providing more stability than competitive kayaks; and canoes, which many customers are more familiar with. As well as providing guided trips, the company also offers shuttle service for paddlers with their own equipment.

“This (the business venture) was a hobby first, then became something more,” Bass said. “We want to see the sport grow and it can be as much or as little of a workout as you want it to be. Every trip is different, even if we’re taking the same route we’ve been down several times before. We had a lot of interest and were really excited this spring, then it just rained and rained and rained, but now we’re picking up again and ready to go.”

Those interested in floating with the Missouri River Paddling Company should bring comfortable clothes and shoes to wear, sunscreen, plenty of water and lunch if desired — everything else is provided. The cost for a four-hour trip is \$35 for one person and \$25 for an additional person in the same watercraft. Group rates are also available. Most trips are scheduled on weekends, but other arrangements can be made with advanced notice.

Trips can be scheduled by calling the company at (816) 352-1765. More information can be found on the company’s Web site — [missouririverpaddling.com](http://missouririverpaddling.com) — including several links for other paddling Web sites in Missouri. The shop in Parkville sells paddling and river books, used watercraft, equipment and more.